

Henry IV and the Towns

The Pursuit of Legitimacy in
French Urban Society, 1589–1610

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France in the 1580s and 1590s

To many historians, and especially to Fernand Braudel, the part French towns played in the religious civil wars, and in particular their support of the Catholic League, marked a return to the age of medieval urban independence.¹ French medieval towns had exhibited a republican spirit that included pride in their urban autonomy, but increasingly during the sixteenth century their hallowed liberties and privileges came under attack.² Louis XI, Charles VIII, Louis XII, Francis I, Henry II, Charles IX, and Henry III all interfered in municipal elections on a sporadic basis and passed a variety of laws designed to increase royal involvement in town politics and finances. Francis I's Edict of Crémieu ordered bailiffs from the local royal courts to observe all municipal general assemblies and elections while Charles IX's Ordonnance of Orléans instructed all towns to submit their financial records to royal officials for auditing. In 1547 Henry II enacted legislation that made municipal offices incompatible with royal ones and ordered municipal offices on town councils reserved for merchants and bourgeois notables. In 1566 Charles IX passed the Ordonnance of Moulins which restricted municipal jurisdiction to criminal affairs and matters of police and delegated all civil suits to royal judges. What these laws had in common was that they threatened municipal independence, although they were operated for the Crown more as fiscal expedients but were rarely enforced. Towns with healthy treasuries and wealthy citizens paid fees to buy exemptions from their restrictions.³ Thus while Crown control of municipal

¹ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Sian Reynolds (New York: Harper and Row), 1215–16.

² For more background on Crown interference in urban government before the reign of Henry IV see Annette Finley-Crowwhite, 'Henry IV and the Towns: Royal Authority and Municipal Autonomy, 1589–1610' (Ph.D. thesis, Emory University, 1991), 26–76.

³ Roger Doucet, *Les Institutions de la France au XVI^e siècle* (Paris: A and J Picard, 1948), vol. 1, 366–7, vol. 2, 501; Gaston Zeller, *Les institutions de la France au XVI^e Siècle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1949), 43; Émile Chénou, *Histoire générale du droit Français public et privé des origines à 1815 1: période Gallo-Romaine, période franke, période féodale et coutumière* (Paris: Société Anonyme du Recueil Sirey, 1926), 388; Nora Temple, 'The Control and Exploitation of French Towns during the Ancien Régime', *History*, 51 (1966), 17; François Isambert, ed., *Recueil général des anciennes lois françaises depuis l'an 420 jusqu'à la Révolution de 1789 8: Henri II* (Paris: Plon Frère, 1822–33), 35; Georges Testaud, *Des juridictions municipales en France des origines jusqu'à l'Ordonnance de Moulins 1566* (Paris: Librairie de la Société du Recueil Général de Lois et des Arrêts, 1901), 5–10, 216–19.

life was both incomplete and ineffective in the last half of the sixteenth century, many towns began to perceive the slow infiltration of royal designs and royal officials into their administrations, and the sense existed that municipal life as experienced in the past was threatened. Within the towns urban life was changing as well. Municipal governments became more oligarchic in the sixteenth century, and internal animosities destroyed the solidarity of the idealized medieval commune. Even so, town-dwellers continued to hold their liberties and privileges with high regard. This was the situation in 1584–5 when a rejuvenated Catholic League came into existence.⁴

The Catholic League has been described as the final phase of the ideological struggle of the religious wars and a reflection of the collective panic generated by the religious fervour and eschatological angst many early modern French men and women felt in times of crisis.⁵ It had its largest impact in the towns. Paris was the crucible of the League where it was established clandestinely in 1584 by an officer of the Bishop of Paris and three zealous clerics. Over the next few years the radical League council, the Sixteen, won adherents throughout the city and penetrated all of the capital's major institutions. Driven by religious passion, Leaguers were united by the desire to exterminate Protestant heresy and preserve a Catholic monarchy in France. During 1587–9, the Sixteen dispatched agents and preachers to key towns throughout France to try and increase the number of urban members. Before the Day of the Barricades approximately three hundred towns of moderate size had joined the League, but after the assassinations at Blois in December 1588, the majority of the major non-Protestant towns in France adopted its cause. The largest and most important Catholic League cities and towns were: Paris (250,000), Rouen (60,000), Marseilles (55,000), Toulouse (400,000), Orléans (37,500), Lyons (32,500), Troyes (25,000), Nantes (25,000), Reims (22,500), and Dijon (14,000).⁶

The period of the Catholic League is often portrayed as one in which the advances made by Renaissance monarchs to bring the towns under tighter Crown control were halted as the towns reasserted their urban independence. According to Fernand Braudel, Bernard Chevalier, Pierre Deyon, Robert Descimon, and J. Russell Major, the League marked a return to municipal autonomy and a medieval

⁴ Ultra-zealous noble Catholics formed a Catholic League in 1576 to exterminate heresy. The rejuvenated League took shape in 1584 and 1585 and was dominated by the Guise family. Mark Greengrass, *France in the Age of Henri IV, the Struggle for Stability* (1995; London: Longman, 1984), 42–72.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 42; Denis Crouzet, *Les guerriers de Dieu: La Violence au temps des troubles de religion, vers 1515–vers 1610*, 2 vols. (Seysssel: Champ Vallon, 1990).

⁶ Philip Benedict, 'French Cities from the Sixteenth Century to the Revolution: An Overview', in *Cities and Social Change in Early Modern France*, ed. Philip Benedict (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 24–5; Gerald Fox, *Three-Thousand Years of Urban Growth* (New York: Academic Press, 1974), 108–10, 114–20, 122; Greengrass, *France in the Age of Henry IV*, 43–55; Mack P. Holt, *The French Wars of Religion, 1562–1629*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 122–3.

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past that the monarchy had fought to overcome.⁷ These scholars believe that League enthusiasm was coupled with a strong desire to recreate the ideal medieval commune by defending municipal privileges and ending Crown infiltration of municipal administrations. Most of the towns were administered and policed by merchants, lawyers, and middle-ranking officeholders. It is argued that the spirit of republicanism arose from these middle-level burghers who joined the League as a means of recovering lost urban autonomy.⁸

Initially League towns did enjoy a renewed independence, at least from royal supervision, but many soon found themselves obeying the dictates of powerful nobles and magistrates who controlled them through their urban clienteles. A few, Marseilles, Saint-Malo, and Morlaix established independent republics, but most towns simply traded royally appointed masters for League appointed ones. Peter Ascoli and Yves Durand have urged caution in associating the Catholic League with municipal independence. Ascoli believes there were varying degrees of independence, and many townspeople actually found themselves with fewer liberties during the League because some governors and mayors wielded dictatorial powers and even forced towns to support hated garrisons, despite their privileged exemptions from billeting troops.⁹ Yves Durand points to the reign of terror that characterized the republics of Marseilles and Saint-Malo where factional fighting included the torture and mutilation of suspect inhabitants as well as the confiscation of their goods. These tactics were practised by many towns during the religious wars, but they seem to have been particularly severe in Marseilles.¹⁰

One aspect of Catholic League history that is usually associated with its urban focus was the creation of the General Council of Union in Paris. Following the Guise murders, the Sixteen urged the creation of a federated union of councils throughout France in which member towns would send delegates to the main council in Paris. Provincial councils were erected in twenty-two cities and towns including Amiens, Dijon, Rouen, Le Mans, Nantes, Bourges, Riom, Agen, Troyes, Poitiers, Lyons, Mâcon, and Toulouse. These key cities became centres of regional alliances affiliated to greater and lesser degrees with the General Council in Paris.

⁷ Braudel, *The Mediterranean 1215–16*; Bernard Chevalier, *Les Bonnes villes de France du xive au xvie siècle* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1982), 111; Robert Descimon, *Qui Etait les seize? Mythes et réalités de la ligue parisienne (1585–1594)* (Paris: Fédération des Sociétés Historiques et Archéologiques de Paris et de L'Ile-de-France, 1983), 62–5, 295–96; Pierre Deyon, *L'Etat face au pouvoir local* (Paris: Editions Locales de France, 1996), 60–2; J. Russell Major, *From Renaissance Monarchy to Absolute Monarchy, French Kings, Nobles, and Estates* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 121.

⁸ Holt, *The French Wars of Religion*, 134–5; Major, *From Renaissance Monarchy to Absolute Monarchy*, 121; J. H. M. Salmon, *Society in Crisis, France in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1975), 252; Mark Konnart argues against this idea in 'Civic Rivalry and the Boundaries of Civil Identity in the French Wars of Religion: Châlons-sur-Marne and the Towns of Champagne', *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme*, 21, 1 (1997), 20.

⁹ Peter Ascoli, 'French Provincial Cities and the Catholic League', *Occasional Papers of the American Society for Reformation Research*, 1 (December 1977), 15–37.

¹⁰ Yves Durand, 'Les Républiques urbaines en France à la fin du XVIe siècle', *Société d'histoire et d'Archéologie de l'Arrondissement de Saint-Malo, annales 1990* (1990), 227–30.

The men who sat on these councils usually included nobles, officeholders, municipal magistrates, town notables, and church officials and represented the leading families in the towns. The councils tried to coordinate military operations, and in some cases finances in the provinces, but their history is not well known. In 1953 Henri Drouot published a short survey of the foundation of several provincial councils, but their breakdown of authority has never been seriously examined. Few of the provincial councils endured for long, however, or were able to create any real unity in the provinces. Their fate was sealed in December 1589 when the duke of Mayenne dissolved the General Council of Union in Paris because it had escaped his control and become a tool of the Sixteen.¹¹

The case of Amiens offers a typical example of a short-lived council. City leaders founded a provincial alliance of towns in Picardy's capital at the end of 1588. Known as the *Chambre des Etats de Picardie*, its members agreed to cooperate with the General Council of Union in Paris, and they invited all Picard towns to join the urban alliance. The authority of the *Chambre* disintegrated quickly, however, when Picardy's leaders quarrelled over finances. Outfitting noble armies and urban militias and supporting member towns proved too large a task for the *Chambre*. The Catholic League duke of Aumale hoped to use the *Chambre* in Amiens to collect taxes through his clients in member towns, but the leaders in neighbouring Abbeville refused to send monies to Amiens, and jurisdictional jealousies throughout Picardy doomed the *Chambre* to a life of only nine months. During its brief existence, the *Chambre* emptied Amiens's treasury and increased the city's indebtedness which already stood in 1588 at 250,000 *livres*.

The league-affiliated regional alliances never functioned effectively, and their ultimate failure suggests that the Catholic League was never as strong in the provinces as many scholars have believed. Urban particularism and devotion to self-interest inhibited regional cooperation during the League while families, noble clienteles, and city populations exhibited a chameleon-like ability to switch sides on political issues. League ideology, especially, after Henry IV's reconversion to Catholicism, failed to offer enough cohesion to supersede urban self-interest. A key component of the Catholic League's demise, therefore, pivoted on the fact that in failing to create a political framework capable of serving as an alternative to monarchy, the League remained a collection of disunited urban cells.¹²

¹¹ Ascoli, 'French Provincial Cities', 18; Greengrass, *France in the Age of Henri IV*, 69; Mark Greengrass, 'The Sainte Union in the Provinces: The Case of Toulouse', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 14 (Fall 1983), 469–96; Annette Finley-Crowwhite, 'Confederates and Rivals: Picard Urban Alliances during the Catholic League, 1588–1594', *Canadian Journal of History/Annales canadiennes d'histoire*, 31 (December, 1996), 359–76; Robert Harding, *The Anatomy of a Power Elite: The Provincial Governors of Early Modern France* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1978), 89–97.

¹² This paragraph is taken from Finley-Crowwhite, 'Confederates and Rivals', 362.

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ECONOMIC AND EPIDEMIOLOGICAL CRISES

The greatest catastrophes occurred in early modern European society when war, crop failure, and epidemic disease struck simultaneously.¹³ Such was the case for France in the 1580s and 1590s. The first half of the sixteenth century had been marked throughout western Europe by population growth.¹⁴ This demographic trend came to an end around 1560, and the downturn was particularly pronounced in France because of the calamities produced by the civil wars.¹⁵ Bad weather contributed to the problem as winters became harsher, springs cooler, and summers wetter causing poor harvests and rising prices. In Languedoc, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie has shown that grain prices between 1585 and 1600 sextupled, wages did not keep up with price rises, textile production fell off, and the standard of living declined.¹⁶ In the 1580s price curves attained their highest levels of the century while taxes rose and exacerbated the depressed economy.¹⁷ 1586–7 was a particularly bad year when nearly all of France suffered a crisis of subsistence and wheat prices rose in the north by nearly seven hundred per cent. This disaster was followed in 1590 by another year of famine in northern France. The south was also hard hit. In Aix corn prices soared in 1591–2 to reach their highest levels for the period 1570–1700.¹⁸

Between 1589 and 1592 military engagements became most intense in the north of France between the Loire and the lower Seine rivers and particularly around Paris. The fighting moved south and west after 1595 into Brittany and Burgundy and culminated along the border with the Spanish Netherlands in 1598.¹⁹ Urban indebtedness also increased, while towns bolstered their defences, outfitted troops, and provisioned passing armies to avert pillage. Troop movements disrupted production, intensified food shortages, and fuelled high prices while sieges decimated urban populations and left survivors frail. Cutting-off trade routes, the wars stymied communications and hindered efforts to send grain shipments to famine-

¹³ Myron P. Gutmann, *War and Rural Life in the Early Modern Low Countries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 4; Henri Hauser, *Recherches et documents sur l'histoire des prix en France de 1500–1800* (Paris: Les Presses Modernes, 1936); Pierre Goubert, *Beauvais et le Beauvaisis de 1600 à 1730. Contribution à l'histoire sociale de la France du XVIIe siècle* (Paris: SEVPEN, 1960); Andrew B. Appleby, 'Grain Prices and Subsistence Crises in England and France, 1590–1740', *The Journal of Economic History*, 39 (1979), 865–87; Pierre Deyon, *Amiens capitale provinciale étude sur la société urbaine au 17e siècle* (Paris: Mouton, 1967); Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *The Peasants of Languedoc*, tr. John Day (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1974).

¹⁴ Le Roy Ladurie, *The Peasants of Languedoc*, 45–9. ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 53–83. ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁷ Martin Wolfe, *The Fiscal System of Renaissance France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 137–84.

¹⁸ Peter Clark, 'Introduction' in *The European Crisis of the 1590s, Essays in Comparative History*, ed. Peter Clark (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1985), 8.

¹⁹ Jean Jacquart, *La Crise Rurale en Ile-de-France 1550–1670* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1974), 179–87; Philip Benedict, 'Civil War and Natural Disaster in Northern France', *The European Crisis of the 1590s*, 84–105; Mark Greengrass, 'The Later Wars of Religion in the French Midi', *The European Crisis of the 1590s*, 106–34; Holt, *The French Wars of Religion*, 193–203.

stricken areas. As markets collapsed, commercial activity also declined.²⁰ Gayle Brunelle contends that in Rouen commercial traffic fell steadily after 1585 and slowed to a virtual stop in 1589 after the foreign merchant community abandoned the city.²¹

Philip Benedict has examined the demographic impact of the wars and shown that during and after the 1591–2 siege of Rouen, mortality rose dramatically and conceptions did not again surpass deaths until well into 1593.²² In referring to this mortality crisis, Benedict notes, ‘Virtually all were casualties not of fighting but of the famine and plague provoked by siege.’²³ The ravaging of the countryside along with bad weather contributed to the fact that the 1590s witnessed the lowest agricultural yields of the century. ‘By about 1580–90’, Le Roy Ladurie has noted, ‘the poor man’s bread was black bread, and the poor man’s wine was cheap piquette.’²⁴ Chronic undernourishment meant that in the last two decades of the sixteenth century the French urban and rural poor were likely to have suffered from micronutrient and vitamin deficiencies that left their bodies weak, their immune systems depressed, and in some cases their mental health impaired.²⁵ Contemporaries reflected on the sad state of the starving peasants who poured into the cities and towns hoping to find food and work. In 1595 one observer in Senlis recorded seeing, ‘men and women, young and old, shivering in the streets, skin hanging and stomachs swollen, others stretched out breathing their last sighs, the grass sticking out of their mouths.’²⁶

Epidemic diseases accompanied famine and the movement of armies and homeless peasants. Wherever one looks in western Europe in the late sixteenth century there is evidence of widespread bubonic plague epidemics. Human suffering during the period also included the increased prevalence of fevers, influenza, whooping

²⁰ Clark, ‘Introduction’, 3–15; R. J. Knecht, *The French Wars of Religion, 1559–1598* (1996; London and New York: Longman, 1989), 90–6.

²¹ Gayle K. Brunelle, *The New World Merchants of Rouen, 1559–1630*, (Kirksville, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1991), 25–6.

²² Philip Benedict, *Rouen during the Wars of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 221. ²³ *Ibid.*, 222. ²⁴ Le Roy Ladurie, *The Peasants of Languedoc*, 106.

²⁵ There is not space here to discuss in detail the impact of famine and disease on human health. For insight into this issue see: Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century 1: The Structures of Everyday Life, The Limits of the Possible*, trans. Sian Reynolds (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), 187–265; Robert Rotberg & Theodore Rabb, *Hunger and History: The Impact of Changing Food Production and Consumption Patterns in Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Peter J. Morgaine, Robert Austin-LaFrance, ‘Prenatal Malnutrition and Development of the Brain’, *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Review*, 17 (1993), 91–128; Alfred Sommer, ‘Vitamin A: Its effect on Childhood Sight and Life’, *Nutrition Reviews*, 52 (February, 1994), 60–6; Henry Ricciuti, ‘Nutrition and Mental Development’, *Psychological Science*, 2 (1993), 43–46; Lindsay Allen, ‘Iron-Deficiency Anemia Increases Risk of Preterm Delivery’, *Nutrition Reviews*, 51 (1993), 49–52; Ernesto Pollitt, ‘Timing and Vulnerability in Research on Malnutrition and Cognition’, *Nutrition Reviews*, 54 (1996), 49–55; Oswald Roels, ‘Vitamin A Physiology’, *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 214 (1970), 1097–102; Ann Carmichael, ‘Infection, Hidden Hunger, and History’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 14 (1983), 249–64.

²⁶ Quoted in Henry Kamen, *European Society 1500–1700* (1996; London and New York: Routledge, 1984), 37.

cough, smallpox, and tuberculosis and the appearance of the new diseases scurvy, rickets, typhus, and scarlet fever.²⁷ In France a revived religious consciousness seeking divine aid in difficult times accompanied epidemic outbreaks that were interpreted as manifestations of God's anger. Many believed the outriders of the apocalypse had been let loose. Religious processions in the 1590s were often staged in reaction to rampant disease while confraternities took on new vigour.²⁸ The religious resurgence of the Catholic League can be explained in part by these epidemics and the apocalyptic fear they engendered.²⁹

One of the towns hardest hit by plague during the period was Marseilles in 1580. This epidemic is rarely discussed although it killed nearly as many inhabitants (around 25,000) as the more famous plague epidemic of 1720. Beaune suffered successive outbreaks in 1568, 1569, 1573, 1577, 1581, 1585, 1596, and 1597, while Dijon endured ten years of seasonal plague outbreaks between 1585 and 1595. 1595–96 were particularly bad years in Burgundy. Chalon-sur-Saône actually capitulated to Henry IV in the middle of a terrible epidemic, having lost one-third of its population. Nor was the rest of the country immune. All major cities in the Midi experienced at least one plague outbreak between 1580 and 1598 just as all major towns in Picardy endured plague epidemics in 1596–7.³⁰ Most plague data, moreover, is related to urban disasters in which the records have been preserved. Epidemiologists have recently proven, however, that heavy losses from plague outbreaks are also incurred in rural areas surrounding large cities.³¹ Urban environments actually produce lower morbidity rates relative to population size than rural communities during plague epidemics.³² This data supports Jean Jacquart's description of rural France during 1589 to 1594 as 'les années terribles'.³³

Reaction to plague epidemics was similar everywhere and tended to foster the breakdown of communal bonds and loyalties.³⁴ Those that could fled the plague stifled city, and in the worst cases this included churchmen and women, members of the medical community, and city leaders. Many cities turned out their poor in visual displays of what some felt was moral indignation. Commerce was affected by the suspension of fairs and markets. Governments collapsed and lawlessness

²⁷ Ann Carmichael, 'Diseases of the Renaissance and Early Modern Europe', in *The Cambridge World History of Human Disease*, ed. Kenneth Kiple (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 279–86. ²⁸ Victor Fouque, *Histoire de Chalon-sur-Saône* (Marseilles: Laffitte Reprints, 1975), 154.

²⁹ For example, Henri Bon, *Essai historique sur les épidémies en Bourgogne depuis l'établissement des Bourgonnes en Gaule jusqu'à la Révolution* (Dijon: Paul Bertheir, n.d.), 70; Wolfgang Kaiser, *Marseille au Temps des Troubles, Morphologie sociale et luttes de factions 1559–1596*, trans. Florence Chaix (Paris: École de Hautes Études, 1992), 243–57; Clark, 'Introduction', 14–15.

³⁰ Greengrass, 'The Later Wars of Religion in the French Midi', 112–13.

³¹ Carmichael, 'Diseases of the Renaissance and Early Modern Europe', 281; O. J. Benedictow, 'Morbidity in Historical Plague Epidemics', *Population Studies*, 41 (1987), 401–31, esp. 421.

³² Benedictow, 'Morbidity in Historical Plague Epidemics', 422.

³³ Jacquart, *La Crise Rurale*, 179–87.

³⁴ Alan Dyer, 'Influence of Bubonic Plague in England, 1500–1667', *Medical History*, 22 (1978), 308–36.

prevailed after town notables fled. In Marseilles in 1580 the municipal deliberations show that the town council rarely met during the plague epidemic.³⁵ In Nîmes during an epidemic in 1587 all of the city government fled except one man, Balthazar Fournier, who heroically remained in the city and tried to maintain some order while seven-thousand inhabitants died.³⁶ In 1596 while plague raged in Amiens, the ramparts fell into disrepair, the guard was irregularly kept, and several of the city's magistrates were fined for abandoning the city.³⁷

Plague epidemics encouraged social conflict in a number of ways. Alan Dyer believes they eroded the bonds that held early modern society together by destroying instincts of sociability in which friends and families relied on each other for mutual assistance.³⁸ Not only did the rich abandon their Christian duties, but their actions stimulated resentment on the part of the populace left behind. Quarantine systems were objectionable and aroused bitterness and fear. Anguish, horror, and grief created a nervous environment that ate away at social cohesiveness and drove people to suspect and distrust those around them.³⁹ Subsistence crises and epidemics greatly increased the social misery of the times and added to the problems that the Catholic League could not solve.

URBAN DISCONTENT AND THE CATHOLIC LEAGUE'S DISINTEGRATION

Enthusiasm for the Catholic League diminished slowly as Henry won battles, decreased markedly after his abjuration in July 1593, and plummeted following his coronation at Chartres in February 1594. The submission of Paris on 22 March 1594 served as a catalyst for other towns on the verge of reconciling, especially those unwilling to accept the Catholic League proposal of a Spanish heir for the French throne. One month after the reduction of Paris, the municipal magistrates in the city recognized that their submission had inspired Troyes, Auxerre, Sens, Chaumont, Bar-sur-Seine, Rouen, Verneuil, Le Havre, Péronne, Montdidier, and Abbeville to accept Henry IV.⁴⁰ Northern French municipalities in 1593–4 ceased to be dominated by Catholic League majorities. Municipal magistrates who had originally cooperated with the League for religious reasons and self-preservation now advocated accepting the newly Catholic Henry IV. In many cases, town leaders grew disgruntled as League promises failed to materialize and royalist enticements became irresistible. The king's manoeuvring weakened the League's hold over urban governments as he played upon the towns' desire for peace. By the time of his abjuration, most towns had grown weary of the suffering caused by marauding

³⁵ Kaiser, *Marseille au temps des troubles*, 246.

³⁶ Victorin Laval, *Des grandes épidémies qui ont régné à Nîmes depuis le vie siècle jusqu'à nos jours* (Nîmes: Clavel-Ballivet, 1876), 80. ³⁷ *Archives Municipales*, Amiens, (hereafter AMA) BB55, fols., 21–4.

³⁸ Dyer, 'Influence of Bubonic Plague', 319. ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 319–20.

⁴⁰ Alexandre Tuetey (ed.), *Registres des Délibérations du Bureau de la Ville de Paris 11: 1594–1598* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1902), 9.

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troops and siege warfare.⁴¹ Once Henry had abjured, there seemed little reason to support the League. The inhabitants of Riom in Auvergne summarized this sentiment well in a published manifesto issued at the town's capitulation. They acknowledged joining the Catholic League because they had rejected the king's Calvinist faith. Because his abjuration had rendered this reason null and void, they willingly recognized his kingship.⁴²

Most large towns left the League after royalists gained control of town governments. Some town councillors voluntarily accepted Henry IV, but in other cases a royalist coup was necessary. Smaller towns were conquered or forced into submission.⁴³ Henry besieged Laon in June and July of 1594, and the city capitulated once supplies of food and munitions were exhausted. The urban militia then joined the populace in demanding a settlement with the king.⁴⁴ The siege of Laon influenced the capitulation of towns in Picardy and the Ile-de-France whose inhabitants feared a repeat performance by the king and his army.⁴⁵

Determining the right moment to switch allegiance was crucial. A miscalculation in staging a royalist coup by Dijon's mayor, Jacques La Verne, resulted in his arrest and decapitation by the city government in 1594.⁴⁶ Yet, one year later his replacement as mayor, René Fleutelot, successfully orchestrated the city's capitulation.⁴⁷ Urban populations between 1592 and 1594 lost their enthusiasm for the League and fell out with League leaders. Contemporary accounts record the changing tide of emotions. A master carpenter of Reims, Jean Pussot, left a journal describing his slow transformation from an earnest Leaguer to a pragmatic royalist. Angry with League nobles and preachers, he wrote in 1594 that the duke of Guise 'accumulates great treasure and riches from the traffic in merchandise and the pillage of war . . .

⁴¹ Asoli, 'French Provincial Cities', 35–6; Greengrass, *France in the Reign of Henri IV*, 58–62; *Archives de la Société des Antiquaires de la Picardie, Musée de Picardie*, CB6, 'Manuscrits originaux ou oeuvres de M. Claude Le Maître, sieigneur de Hardicourt, citoyen, et échevin d'Amiens concernant la defense de cette ville pendant la Ligue, 1597', and 'Harangue de M. le maieur Augustin de Louvencourt, 12 Août 1595'.

⁴² Auguste Poirson, *Histoire du Règne de Henri IV* (Paris: Didier et Cie., Libraires-Editeurs, 1862), vol. 4, 576.

⁴³ Ascoli, 'French Provincial Cities,' 35–36.

⁴⁴ Anthoine Richart, *Mémoires sur la ligue dans le Laonnais* (Paris: Didron-Neveu, 1869), 465–7.

⁴⁵ Jean Gaillard, *Les derniers temps de la ligue à Beauvais* (Beauvais: Imprimerie du Moniteur de l'Oise, 1900), 30.

⁴⁶ M. de Gouvenais (ed.), *Inventaire-sommaire des Archives Communales antérieures à 1790, ville de Dijon* (Paris: Imprimerie et Librairie Administratives de Paul Dupont, 1867), vol. 1, 111; Henri Drouot, *Un épisode de la ligue à Dijon, l'affaire La Verne (1594)* (Dijon: Revue Bourguignonne and l'Université de Dijon), vol. 20, 1910; Holt, *The French Wars of Religion*, 145–7. La Verne was ambitious and used political allegiances to further his political legitimacy. Involved in factional politics, he opted for the royalist cause only after his dictatorial power began to slip in Dijon as townspeople grew critical of the League.

⁴⁷ Henri Drouot, 'Henri IV et les officiers de la milice dijonnaise, 1595', *Esquisses 1573–1600, Etudes Bourguignonnes sur le XVI^e siècle* (Dijon: Bernigaud et Privat, 1937), 71.

all at the expense of poor people'.⁴⁸ Pussot participated in a secret coup to deliver Reims to Henry IV, and eventually reflected on the Catholic League as 'a time of terrible calamities and miserable wars and intrigues'.⁴⁹ Women also voiced anti-League sentiments and influenced events. In Dijon, Madeleine Hennequin, wife of the parlement's first president, grew dissatisfied with League leadership in 1594. She badgered Dijon's mayor, René Fleutelot, to capitulate one year before the city's actual surrender. Hennequin argued that Dijon's inhabitants wanted to accept Henry IV, but a powerful few, tainted by their League affiliation, resisted submission. Her words stirred protest within the city and several prominent League leaders were hanged in effigy.⁵⁰

Renouncing the League was often the result of popular protest. Weavers in Amiens, wine-growers in Dijon, and militia captains in Lyons demanded capitulation from their municipal leaders in 1594 and 1595.⁵¹ On 8 February 1594, Lyons's inhabitants jettisoned their green scarves symbolizing the Catholic League and replaced them with white scarves associated with the royalist cause. At the end of the day a militia captain erected a large portrait of Henry IV in front of the *Hôtel de Ville*, and the next day Alphonse d'Ornano marched into Lyons and accepted the city's capitulation.⁵²

Circulars sent from newly won Paris, royalist propaganda, and letters from the king convinced many to submit. By 1594 Henry had already proven himself a clement conqueror. On the battlefield, he was one of only a few early modern commanders who tried to prevent pillage, rape and wanton destruction by his troops.⁵³ Mark Greengrass emphasizes that the king sought to win 'his subjects' hearts as well as their minds'.⁵⁴ Henry revealed his magnanimity and compassion by allowing three-thousand starving peasants to leave Paris during the siege of 1590 and by freeing prisoners after the 1590 battle of Ivry.⁵⁵ Clearly he preferred negotiation and settlement over combat and offered generous terms to the van-

⁴⁸ Edouard Henry (ed.), 'Mémoires ou journalier de Jean Pussot', *Travaux de l'Académie Impériale de Reims*, 25 (1857), 25. Pussot wrote that Guise 'accumule grands trésors et richesse tant de trafiques de marchandise que des pillages de la guerre, d'rançons, tailles, subsides, péages, que pentions de tout aux dépense des pauvres gens'.

⁴⁹ Edouard Henry (ed.), 'Journalier ou Mémoires de Jehan Pussot, Notices biographique et bibliographique', *Travaux de l'Académie Impériale de Reims*, 23 (1855), 128. Pussot wrote of 'temps d'effroyables calamités de misérables guerres et intrigues'.

⁵⁰ M. de la Cuisine, *Le Parlement de Bourgogne* (Dijon: J-E Rabutot, 1864), 2, 223-5; Annette Finley-Crowwhite, 'Engendering the Wars of Religions: Female Agency during the Catholic League in Dijon', *French Historical Studies*, 20 (1997), 127-54. ⁵¹ Ascoli, 'French Provincial Cities', 36.

⁵² Jean H. Mariéjol, *Charles-Emmanuel de Savoie duc de Nemours, Gouverneur du Lyonnais, Beaujolais, et Forez (1567-1595)* (Paris: Hachette, 1935), 226-8.

⁵³ T. W. Loveridge, 'Henri IV as Military Commander', unpublished paper, 11. The author thanks Mr. Loveridge for a copy of the paper. ⁵⁴ Greengrass, *France in the Age of Henri IV*, 75.

⁵⁵ Ibid.; 'Brief traité des misères de la ville de Paris', in *Archives Curieuses de l'Histoire de France depuis Louis XI jusqu'à Louis XVIII*, eds. M. L. Cimber and F. Danjou (Paris: Membres de l'Institut Historique, 1837), 278.

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quished. He wrote to the municipal government of Dijon shortly before the town's capitulation in 1595 extolling his legitimacy and benevolence.

We are assured that you will never agree to such a lamentable felony [accepting Spanish tyranny], and that you retain sparks of the vehement zeal with which your predecessors embraced the sweet subjection to this Crown. We write to you, therefore, to invite you to quit suffering and depriving yourselves of the peace and contentment that God is preparing for this realm. He wishes and commands you to conform. In the meantime, we believe you cannot ignore the authority and royal power His divine goodness put in our hands and extends to you by grace and miraculous advancement.⁵⁶

The king promised his subjects mercy and forgiveness and deployed his own agents to the towns to publicize his clemency. In 1594 he sent one of his secretaries, Nicolas du Fren, on a successful mission as an undercover emissary to Abbeville to try and sway the town's mayor, Jean de Maupin, to capitulate.⁵⁷ Méric de Vic worked more openly for Henry IV in Languedoc and wrote to him from Albi in 1595 stating, 'We have offered all of the important towns the benevolence and protection of Your Majesty, [and] sent them your letters.'⁵⁸

Much of the responsibility for the towns' submissions fell upon the mayors and other city leaders. In Troyes, for example, the *premier échevin*, Jean Paillot, adopted the royalist cause in 1593–4 and thereafter acted as the king's agent to encourage his fellow magistrates and townspeople to abandon the League.⁵⁹ In Beauvais, a lawyer, Léonard Driot, urged city leaders to make peace with the king by emphasizing their desperate situation in the summer of 1594: 'We are surrounded not only by enemy forces but also by rival towns [who have already capitulated], and the inhabitants for the most part do not want to expose themselves to the dangers of a siege.'⁶⁰ After negotiations were completed and capitulation treaties were signed, mayors and

⁵⁶ Printed in Henri Drouot, 'Cinq lettres de Henri IV sur le fin de la Ligue en Bourgogne (1594–1595)', *Mémoires de l'Académie de Dijon* (1924), section 2, 264–5. 'L'assurance que nous avons que ne consentirés jamais à une si lasche felonnie, et qu'il vous reste encores quelque estincelle de ceste vehemente ardeur [avec] laquelle voz predecesseurs ont embrassé la douce subjection de ceste Couronne, nous faict vous escrire la presente, pour vous convier, sure la fidelité que vous nous devés, que vous ne souffriés plus longuement vous priver du bien, repos et contentement, que vous voyés que Dieu prepare à tout nostre Royaume, à la volonté et commandement duquel il vous convient conformer: et cependant, de l'auctorité et puissance Royale, que sa Divine bonté nous a mis en main, et donnee sur vous successivement, et confirmee par tant de graces et advancement miraculeux que vous ne pouvés ignorer.' For royalist propaganda see, Greengrass, *France in the Age of Henri IV*, 73–88.

⁵⁷ *Archives Municipales*, Abbeville, MS 310, heading 'Jean de Maupin'. Du Fren was a native of Abbeville and presumably used this fact to disguise his reason for visiting the town.

⁵⁸ BN, MSS fr. 23195, fol. 179v. 'Nous avons offrir à toutes les villes plus importantes la bienveillance et protection de vostre Majesté, leur envoiant de vos lettres.'

⁵⁹ Théophile Boutiot, *Histoire de la ville de Troyes et de la Champagne méridionale* (Troyes: Dufey-Robert, 1873), vol. 4, 234–5.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Gaillard, *Les derniers temps de la ligue*, 39. 'Nous sommes environnés non seulement de forces ennemies mais aussi de villes contraires, et vos habitants pour la plupart ne se veulent exposer aux dangers d'un siège.'

magistrates concluded the surrender process by personally unlocking their town gates and permitting the royalists to enter. In Paris, the leading *échevin*, Martin Langlois, opened the Porte Saint-Denis to begin the city's formal surrender.⁶¹ Municipal councillors who had aided in the submission of their towns usually won special favours from the king, which sometimes took the form of letters of *annoblissement*. The most compromised Leaguer leaders suffered imprisonment or exile once their town had capitulated although most of these men were eventually forgiven by Henry IV and allowed to return home.⁶²

Town and provincial governors influenced both the timing and the success of submissions. Louis de L'Hôpital, baron of Vitry and governor of Meaux, recognized Henry IV in late-1593 and persuaded the people of Meaux to do likewise; the city gates were opened to the king on 4 January 1594.⁶³ Abbeville was persuaded to capitulate by the persistence of the duke of Longueville, governor for the king in Picardy. Town governors who aided the surrender were paid handsomely for their services. A former League noble, the sieur of Saisseval, governor of Beauvais, received a share of 2,600 *écus* for assisting in the capitulation of his city.⁶⁴ Great regional magnates guaranteed the surrender of key towns in their provinces upon settling with, or rather selling their loyalties to Henry. Claude de la Châtre, governor and lieutenant general of Berry, made peace with Henry in early 1594 and earned for himself 250,000 *écus* by bringing the cities of Bourges and Orléans into the king's camp.⁶⁵

Towns, however, did not need to wait for their provincial governors to be reconciled with Henry. Municipal leaders in Amiens submitted years before the duke of Mayenne and against the wishes of their League governor, the duke of Aumale.⁶⁶ Similarly, when Troyes decided to make peace with the king, the bourgeois militia forced their governor and League chief, Claude of Lorraine, the prince of Joinville, to leave the town.⁶⁷ Municipal leaders in Lyons never enjoyed good relations with their League governor, the duke of Nemours, and actually imprisoned him in 1593 after his troops ravaged the countryside, raping and killing those allied with the League.⁶⁸

The Catholic League came to an end in the various treaties of capitulation negotiated with towns and nobles between 1593 and 1598. While each capitulation

⁶¹ David Buisseret, *Henry IV* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1984), 51.

⁶² See for example Ponson Bernard, 'Journal of Ponson Bernard', ed. F. Rolle, *Revue du Lyonnais*, 30 (1865), 444.

⁶³ Michael Wolfe, "'Paris is Worth a Mass' Reconsidered: Henri IV and the Leaguer Capital, March 1594', paper presented at the Society for French Historical Studies conference, Wilmington, Delaware, March 1994, p. 4. I thank Dr. Wolfe for giving me a copy of his paper; Jean-Pierre Babelon, *Henri IV* (Paris: Fayard, 1982), 568. ⁶⁴ BN MSS fr., 16216, fol. 114r.

⁶⁵ Pierre de L'Estoile, *Journal de L'Estoile pour le Règne de Henri IV*, ed. L. Lefevre (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), 393.

⁶⁶ Révérend Père Daire, *Histoire de la ville d'Amiens depuis son origine jusqu'à présent* (Paris: Chez-laveuve de Laguerre, 1757), 328–9. ⁶⁷ Poirson, *Histoire du Règne*, vol. 4, 575.

⁶⁸ Mariéjol, *Charles-Emmanuel de Savoie duke of Nemours*, 165–98.

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treaty was unique, they did share certain similarities. Articles generally acknowledged that only the Catholic religion would be practised inside the town, although some treaties allowed for the practice of Calvinist worship in a nearby location. Other clauses reaffirmed privileges and franchises, addressed municipal taxes and extended *octrois*, or stated that key institutions such as a parlement or a *bureau des finances* would be maintained. Nobles, churchmen, gentlemen, magistrates, and inhabitants who had joined the League were pardoned while royal officials were confirmed in their positions and promised back wages. Most treaties also addressed specific matters. In Amiens's treaty of capitulation, the king formally forgave the magistrates who had imprisoned the royalist duke of Longueville's mother in the city for several years in the early 1590s. The treaty also guaranteed the Leaguer duke of Aumale a passport in the form of a letter of safe conduct from the king to leave Amiens.

Most treaties were also similar in emphasizing forgiveness and the importance of forgetting the past. The molestation of clergy and secular leaders over wrongs committed during the League was prohibited, and townspeople were instructed to live in peace. Just as Henry had forgiven his rebellious subjects, he encouraged all French men and women to follow his reconciliatory lead and work for greater harmony, the merits of which he promised would return prosperity to France.⁶⁹ Mark Greengrass states, 'The rest of the reign would be devoted to attempting to confirm the benefits which could accompany stability.'⁷⁰ The part played by the towns in the civil wars had led to the disintegration of France. Henry IV's achievement can be seen in his reconstruction of the urban political framework of his country into a united whole that recognized his legitimate authority and the political authority of the French monarchy. Chapter two begins the discussion of this achievement by examining in-depth the 1594 capitulation of Amiens.

⁶⁹ Copies of treaties can be found in DeVic and Vaissete, *Histoire général de Languedoc* (Toulouse: Privat, 1889), col. 1553–64; 'Articles de la capitulation arrêtes à Champmaillot entre les Députés de la Ville et le Maréchal de Biron', and 'Confirmation de ces articles par le roi Henri IV', *Archives Municipales*, Dijon, B119, fols. 6v–9v; AMA, BB53, fols. 166–71rv; B9, fol. 347, 26–7 May 1585; Augustin Thierry, *Recueil des monuments inédits de l'histoire du Tiers-Etat* (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1856), vol. 2, 1059–69. ⁷⁰ Greengrass, *France in the Age of Henry IV*, 88.